

Today, the Subcommittee meets to discuss how our nation's reliance on other countries for important mineral commodities has drastically increased over time.

In the mid-80s, the U.S. was dependent on foreign sources for 30 non-fuel minerals. By 2017, our import dependence had more than doubled to 64 commodities, 20 of which are imported entirely.

We often talk about how the number of minerals imported has increased, but it's also important to point out where they are coming from. Here is a map from the USGS that highlights the countries of origin for the minerals that we import over half. Some are not so bad, like our neighbors to the north or our friends down under –which I might add, have permitting timelines far superior to ours. Some are a lot more concerning. Take for instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo, which fails at safeguarding its citizens basic human rights. Or China, which has environmental standards well below ours.

Something this map doesn't show is China's aggressive investment strategy beyond its borders in lithium, cobalt, and graphite mines around the world. These actions show its intention of consolidating and tightening its grip on the market for these minerals. We cannot continue to ignore security implications of the actions of nations like China.

The defense industry, among other critical industries, relies upon a healthy supply of strategic minerals – many of these are imported from unfriendly countries, leaving America's supply chain vulnerable.

While we can agree on the concept that there are good places for mines and bad places for mines, what constitutes a "bad place" is where our opinions diverge. We cannot, in good conscience, import minerals critical to our economic and manufacturing base while allowing these materials to flow from regions where the human and environmental costs exceed what they would be if we were self-sufficient.

So how have we arrived at our current situation?

Back in March, this Subcommittee held an oversight hearing highlighting the importance of raw materials in a variety of infrastructure projects. From rocks to roads, rare earths to green technologies, and iron ore to wind farms, all infrastructure projects rely upon a mining operation. The diversity of the nation's mineral endowment allows for the U.S. to be self-sufficient, yet domestic production of solid mineral resources has been falling.

During that hearing, we learned about how declining exploration in the U.S. has contributed to an increased import dependency for minerals. In the early 90s, the U.S. attracted 20 percent of the worldwide exploration budget; today it hovers around 7 percent. Without domestic exploration, significant declines in U.S. mineral production are unavoidable.

We also heard about how an uncertain and lengthy permitting scheme stymies the ability to access the needed raw materials that are available in our own backyard. The Committee discussed the years of environmental studies, permitting, bonding, and stakeholder engagement, both at the state and federal level. In some cases, the time required to obtain a permit can be a decades-long process. In comparison, mine projects in Canada and Australia can obtain the necessary permits in two to three years, without limiting environmental protections.

Today we will continue that discussion with a hearing about the challenge of mineral withdrawals. Decades of withdrawing public lands from mineral entry has worsened the import reliance situation, and new mining operations are already either restricted or banned on more than half of all federally owned public lands. The economic and geopolitical implications of these federal actions cannot be taken lightly.

Sourcing raw materials domestically keeps costs down, creates both direct and indirect jobs, reduces the holistic

impact of mining, keeps the dollars invested in America in the United States, and keeps our security paramount.

Today's hearing will continue our focus on pressing issues facing the mining industry and the implications these issues have on the U.S. economy, supply chain, and its security interests.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here and look forward to hearing from them today.